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ABSTRACT

This report describes a project for teaching students to implement social skills in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom. The hope is to reduce the inappropriate behavior that occurs in these areas. The targeted population consisted of a middle to lower income elementary school in Illinois. After analyzing the data collected, it was revealed that most educators surveyed noted that students were lacking appropriate social skills in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom. The researchers concluded that the causes of the problem in this building were high mobility rate, lack of school wide discipline plan, and parent involvement/family issues. Based on the researchers' findings, social skills have been a problem area for students in many areas of the nation. The researchers implemented a 14 week plan to instruct second and sixth grade students on the usage of appropriate social skills. The procedure that was chosen to implement was the direct instruction of social skills through cooperative learning. The teacher researchers used cooperative learning strategies to enable students to practice the appropriate social skills. Data after the intervention indicated that the students' attitudes and knowledge of uses of appropriate social skills were increased through the use of cooperative learning strategies. Student behavior improved in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom. Student referrals were fewer and students' behavior improved significantly over time. Teacher researchers would recommend that the direct instruction of basic social skills be taught as part of the school curriculum. Four appendixes include the social skills survey and checklist, student survey, and the pretest/posttest. (Contains 24 references and 6 tables.) (GCP)

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IMPROVING STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Field-Based Master's Program

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Abstract

Title: IMPROVING STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Authors: Sally Krantz, Heather McDermott, Lynn Schaefer, Mary Ann Snyder

Date: May 2003

This report describes a project for teaching students to implement social skills in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom. The hope is the reduce the inappropriate behavior that occurs in these areas. The targeted population consisted of a middle to lower income school in Illinois. The students that were involved were in the second and sixth grade. The problems of mobility, financial difficulties, and shifting demographics were a few of the issues that the community faced.

After analyzing the data collected, it was revealed that most educators surveyed noted that students were lacking appropriate social skills in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom. The researchers concluded that the causes of the problem in this building were high mobility rate, lack of school wide discipline plan, and parent involvement/family issues. Based on the researchers' findings, social skills have been a problem area for students in many areas of the nation.

After a comprehensive review of available literature and careful study of the data collected, the researchers implemented a 14 week plan to instruct second and sixth grade students on the usage of appropriate social skills. The procedure that was chosen to implement was the direct instruction of social skills through cooperative learning. The teacher researchers developed and implemented an action plan to instruct students to use appropriate social skills in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom setting. The teacher researchers used cooperative learning strategies to enable the students to practice the appropriate social skills.

Data after the intervention indicated that the students' attitudes and knowledge of uses of appropriate social skills were increased through the use of cooperative learning strategies. Student behavior improved in the classroom, playground, and lunchroom. Student referrals were fewer and students' behavior improved significantly over time. Teacher researchers would recommend that the direct instruction of basic social skills be taught as part of the school curriculum.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The targeted second and sixth grade students in a mid-western community exhibited a deficiency of appropriate social skills. This problem was evident because teachers observed disruptive behavior in the classrooms, increased need for counseling services, and improper behavior during unstructured activities which interfered with instructional time. Evidence for this problem was gathered through teacher observation, anecdotal records, teacher surveys, and student surveys.

Local Context of the Problem

This particular school building was more than one hundred years old. It was a two story building with an addition of a gym. There were 18 classrooms, 10 regular classrooms and 8 support rooms. The gym doubled as a lunchroom, had a stage, kitchen facilities, the playground was renovated, and parking lot enlarged. There was a main office, a nurse's office, an administrative office, a staff lounge, and custodial facilities. There were eight student restrooms and three staff restrooms and the entire building was rewired for Internet service in each classroom and in the computer lab. Each classroom was wired for phones.

Student enrollment in grades K-6 was approximately 230 students. (The school had two sections of every grade level, except for kindergarten, second, fifth and sixth grades.) Attendance patterns fluctuated over the last several years, but averaged about 90% most of the time. There was a high mobility rate and enrollment was constantly shifting. Student demographics were as follows: 66.4% White, 10.3% Black, 22.4% Hispanic, and .9% Native American. The free and reduced lunch percentage was approximately 55%.

The faculty of the school included 19 teachers, 20 support personnel, and an administrator. The average years of experience of the teachers was approximately 13 years. There were six teachers with master's degrees. There were 18 female and one male teacher. None were minority. The support personnel included: 2 men and 18 women, of which 5% were minority.

The curriculum of the school was multifaceted. The school was a Title I funded school. There was Title I reading teachers and Reading Recovery. The curriculum covered grade K-6. Every classroom had computer class which included an Integrated Learning System program at each student's learning level. Every classroom received classes in other areas of the curriculum, such as music, art, physical education, and library, one time a week. There were services available for students with special needs, such as learning disabled resource, speech and language, counseling, and bilingual tutoring. After the school day, there were many programs available for students. There was a YMCA Day Care program, Homework Club, detention, Computer Lab, Art Club, Student Council, Garden Club and an After School Fun Club. Other programs available to students were track, patrol, physical fitness, Jr. Achievement, D. A. R. E., human

growth and development, bicycle safety, summer school, career day, and school to work programs. There was a parent coordinator that kept communication open between home and school. There was also a program with Youth Service Bureau to have parent training and informational nights.

The school gave many awards and recognitions to students and staff. Students were recognized for academic achievement and improvement, physical fitness, patrol of the year, student council officers, citizenship awards, attendance awards, scholarships, sixth grade 90th percentile award, free throw award, business partnership award, contig math tournaments, spelling contests, and "Lunch with a Cop". Recognition for staff included contributions to local charities, fund raising, business partnership awards, Master Teacher Awards, and partnerships with local churches.

An issue and concern of this school was the high mobility rate. There were many students moving in and out of the school, which led to inconsistent testing patterns. A strong push had been implemented to slow down the number of absent and tardy students. An attempt to encourage parental involvement in the school had been a priority, as well as leading students to obtain appropriate social behavior in the school environment.

Community Context of the Problem

The population of the community was approximately 43,000 people, and was actually part of a metropolitan area. The city was surrounded by 4 other cities that when added together had a population of about 370,000 people. The city by itself, without the surrounding community, was large enough and had much to offer its residents. However there was still a strong sense of community and a pleasant small town atmosphere.

The demographics were varied and going through a shift. The population was about 48% male and 52% female. There seemed to be an influx of different ethnic groups in all areas of the city. The city was home to people from many different countries. Based upon the 2000 United States Census the demographics of the different groups were 83% White, 4% Black, 12% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. Comparisons with the 1990 census showed that the Hispanic population doubled in this area. The median age of the people in the city was approximately 36 years.

The business make-up of the city was 95 manufacturing businesses and 105 retail or wholesale businesses. The economy of the area seemed to be declining a bit as the national economy declined. Some of the larger manufacturing companies in the area downsized or closed, which had an impact on the community. The average income was about $46,000. The housing occupancy in the area was about 19,500 units. According to the 2000 census, 67% were occupied by owners and 33% were occupied by renters.

The school district in the city consisted of 20 school buildings and an administration building. There were approximately 500 professional staff assigned to all of the buildings. The curriculum was varied and diverse. It included pre-K-12 curriculum, special education, and alternative education schools.

Some major concerns of the district were financial difficulties, mobility, and shifting demographics. With the reduction in the manufacturing industry, many students were more mobile and lived in lower economic areas. The changes in industry continued to have an effect on the school district. Student populations were constantly shifting and the schools which were surrounded by rental properties, were seeing many students without stability. An increased need for bilingual education was also becoming more

prevalent as many families spoke languages other than English.

Recreation opportunities in the area were many. In the city itself there were many options for entertainment such as parks, Little League, a soccer club, and semi-professional sports. There was also a civic center which housed sporting events, concerts, and many other opportunities for entertainment. Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), libraries, public pools, and waterslides were some of the many family activities that were available. When the surrounding cities were considered, there were many additional opportunities. Because this community was near two rivers, river activities such as boating, and riverboat gambling were a major part of the community. Malls, theatres, restaurants, and local museums were also a part of this extended community.

An issue that continued to concern those living in this area were shifting demographics. With the reductions in the manufacturing industry, people in the area seemed to be moving around more and living in lower social-economic areas. Land for any new development was also difficult to find because of the city being surrounded by other cities. Many of the large buildings that were at one time manufacturing companies, remained empty. The downtown area, where many of these factories were located, were in need of re-development. Small business owners, dependent on these factories for income, moved to other locations.

National Context of the Problem

Children exhibiting inappropriate social skills in the classroom has been an ongoing problem for educators. Disruptive behavior in classrooms is often a result of lack of appropriate social skills which cause a loss of instructional time. According to

Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1993), "An essential component and important prerequisite for academic learning is the teaching of social skills"(p.29). Understanding and teaching students appropriate behavior in the classroom setting has often been a difficult task.

Social problems of students have been increasing over the years. Several researchers have concluded that there are links between the social and academic lives of children (Parke, Harshman, & Roberts, 1998). If these social problems are not addressed during early childhood, they may become more serious over the years.

The effects that these problems are having on students in classrooms are enormous. Many students seem unable to manage their behavior and get along with others. According to Farivar and Webb (1994), some students demonstrate social incompetence due to lack of practice or prior knowledge of appropriate classroom social skills. Students often are unable to do seemingly normal practices such as expressing gratitude, asking questions, sharing ideas, or waiting for a turn to speak.

The problem continues to be a serious threat to student learning. The learning of appropriate social skills is the foundation for the prevention of social problems and leads to the development of skills needed for successful academic functioning (Begun, 1995). Lack of academic progress is often related to a deficiency of social skills.

Students must learn the tasks that seem natural to most adults. They need to be taught the everyday social skills of getting along with others. These skills are fundamental for the future of the students' educational progress and, ultimately, the students' ability to be a part of the work force. The future success of all students depends heavily on their ability to react appropriately in social settings.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Evidence of the Problem

The targeted students in second and sixth grade classrooms demonstrated a lack of appropriate social skills in the classroom, on the playground, and in the lunchroom setting. There was evidence that appropriate social skills needed to be taught because of the increased need for counseling services, increased discipline issues, and disrupted instructional time.

The evidence supporting an investigation into the teaching of appropriate social skills to students in second and sixth grades was gathered through the use of teacher and student surveys. Researchers recorded the percentages of responses from the teachers' social skills survey. The results of the teacher's survey indicated a need to instruct students on the use of appropriate social skills. The three areas where there was unanimous agreement included that social skills must be taught, teachers are willing to learn strategies to teach social skills, and students lack mediation ability (See Table 1).

Table 1

Percent of Responses on the Social Skills Survey of Teacher's Attitudes Toward Students

Survey Questions	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
Substantial time spent mediating	90	10	0
Teaching social skills is necessary	100	0	0
Teacher is responsible to teach social skills	80	20	0
Teachers prepared to teach social skills	70	30	0
Teachers willing to learn strategies	100	0	0
Teacher's opinion that students don't have knowledge of social skills	80	0	20
Teachers' opinion that students lack mediation abilities	100	0	0
Teacher's opinion that student's lack social skills	70	20	10

n=10

Researchers recorded the percentages of responses from the students' social skills survey. The results of the survey indicated a lack of appropriate social skills in certain areas. The six areas that show the greatest need for instruction included: raising hands, not interrupting, using quiet voices, solving conflicts, lining up, and getting along with others (See Table 2).

Table 2

Percent of Responses on the Student's Survey of Attitudes Toward Appropriate Social Skills

Survey Questions	Yes	No	Sometimes
I raise my hand to speak.	50	10	40
I do not interrupt others.	50	10	40
I use a quiet voice in groups.	50	10	40
I wait in the lunch line without pushing.	90	0	10
I say please/thank you to lunch helpers.	80	0	20
I don't talk with food in my mouth or throw food.	80	10	10
I share and take turns on the playground.	70	10	20
I solve problems without hitting, name-calling, or tattling.	60	10	30
When the bell rings, I line up without pushing or talking.	60	10	30
I get along with others most of the time.	60	10	30

n=51

Checklists were used to track the students' social skill progress over time. Researchers recorded the percentages of students showing appropriate social skills prior to instruction. Each item on the checklist was noted during a period of teacher observation. It appeared that half of the students were unable to use the observed social

skill. The students were observed in both structured and unstructured environments. The teacher researchers were concerned at the lack of appropriate social skills observed. These results indicated a need to teach appropriate social skills (See Table 3).

Table 3

Percent of Observed Students' Usage of Appropriate Social Skills

Social Skills Checklist	Yes	No
Using quiet voices	45	55
Following directions	48	52
Taking turns	43	57
Patient waiting	52	48
Praising	39	61
Using names	30	70
Saying kind things	36	64
Sharing ideas	46	54
Sharing task	48	52
Sharing materials	46	54
Helping others	38	62
Asking for help	59	41
Resolving conflicts	39	61
Accepting differences	32	68
Staying on task	36	64
Staying with the team	52	48
Active listening	39	61
Communicating clearly	48	52
Paraphrasing	43	57
Participating equally	41	59
Managing materials	34	66
Recording ideas	43	57

n=56

After the researchers reviewed the data, the conclusion was reached that fewer that 50 % of the students were not exhibiting appropriate social skills. There was also a discrepancy between teacher observed behaviors and students' responses on the student survey. The teacher researchers concluded from the data that the students were aware of the appropriate social skills. However, after observation, the teacher researchers did not observe the appropriate behaviors being practiced. After consideration of these data, the teacher researchers agreed that appropriate social skills were deficient and an action plan was needed.

Probable Causes of the Problem

The teacher researchers identified three main causes for the lack of appropriate social skills. The first cause was student mobility. According to the school's records, the mobility rate was approximately 20%, which meant one-fifth of the school's population changed during the year. The number of students moving in and out of the building had an impact on the level of appropriate student behavior. Behavior policies and rules were not always carried through with the new students due to lack of time and personnel. There was an inconsistency with the follow-through of behavior policies.

Another cause for inappropriate social skills was a lack of a school-wide plan for discipline. There was no organized discipline plan in place; and some teachers were inconsistent with their approach to necessary measures to be taken for infractions of school rules. Some rules were ambiguous and difficult to enforce from one grade level to the next.

According to Beland (1997), approximately 25% of students in a school display behavior problems, and 15% of students are involved in bullying activities. The

percentage of students being victimized by bullies regularly is increasing every year. Many of these students who are bullies have come from abusive or aggressive homes. Children of aggressive environments often lead to bullying tendencies. Since the social skills are not taught in the home, the responsibility shifts to the schools. Building social competence is necessary to prevent aggressive behavior, and a school-wide discipline plan may be instrumental in beginning this process.

Aggressive behavior often leads to difficulty in developing positive and productive relationships with peers and adults. Gresham and Elliott (1993) stated that social skills in schools are important for many reasons. Children who have difficult relationships with peers often have higher cases of maladjustment, suspensions, expulsions, higher drop-out rates, delinquency, and child psychology issues. Peer relationships give children the opportunity to learn how to develop relationships, resolve conflicts, and establish close relationships with peers (Jewett, 1992). A school-wide discipline plan helps teachers focus on inappropriate behavior, enables students to steer their energies toward more positive behavior choices, and provide a framework for academic and social success.

Another cause of inappropriate social skills may be lack of parental involvement. According to Garbarino (1997), parental involvement in the lives of children has decreased by 50% in the last 30 years. The negative influences that children who are home alone encounter includes the media, video games, and music. Some children tend to be not involved in structured activities that are supported by adults. Many students spend increasing amounts of time alone with little adult guidance or supervision. According to Kreidler (1994), children are constantly exposed to negative comments each

day at school, in the media, and in the home. Children often hear unkind, negative, and destructive comments which are carried into the schools and manifest themselves in the classroom, and teachers need to address this negative behavior.

Bellanca (1992) reported that sociologists have documented an increased number of children who have come from single-parent, dual-working parents, or alternative family situations. The sociologists reported that these family structures are the norm, not the exception. These same sociologists have shown that these different family structures might have an effect on students' academic achievement or behavior in school. Many experienced teachers corroborate this information. Most parents, especially those who are sole parents or dual-working parents, know the special challenges and unusual child rearing problems they experience. Probably the most difficult task is the lack of time these parents have for their children. The time to support, aid, correct, demonstrate positive values, communicate expected behavior, and encourage appropriate social skills is often not there, not because parents are bad, but because they are having difficulty earning the money to keep their family fed and clothed. When the decreased time and energy for appropriate supervision are included, the results may be that many students arrive at the school's door without the basic appropriate social skills in place (O'Neil,1996). According to Walker, Schwartz, Nippold, Irwin, and Noell (1994), social skills and social competence are long term correlates of school success and play an important role in non-school social behavior adjustments that can influence school performance.

Communication is often a difficult task for many parents. Even if parents are working at a hectic pace, there still needs to be some communication between the parent

and child. In the New Haven public schools, facilitators from the social development program taught the parents problem solving techniques that their sixth graders learned in the classroom. During the parenting classes, the parents were coached in ways to resolve problems such as dish duty, T.V. watching, or homework. The parents applied the techniques to problems with their children and schools in the community (Sullivan-DeCarlo & DeFalco, 1998). Communication between school and home and parent and child is vital to the success of the child's academic and social progress in school. Duggan (1995) suggested that parents need to be encouraged to use appropriate social skills at home and provide feedback on new skills their children are developing.

The students in the targeted school demonstrated an inadequate knowledge of appropriate social skills. This problem was identified through the collection of data, pretests, and checklists which measured students' ability to use appropriate social skills in the classroom, on the playground, and in the lunchroom setting. The teacher researchers concluded that teachers carry the added responsibility to teach appropriate social skills, because of the impact of human relations that each of their students will encounter in life (Begun, 1995).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

The lack of appropriate social skills of the students in the second and sixth grade classrooms interfered with instructional time. Appropriate social skills needed to be established for classrooms, playground, and lunchroom settings. This problem had increased over the years. Researchers concluded that there were links between the social and academic lives of children (Parke, Harshman, & Roberts, 1998). The issues that teachers dealt with following unstructured activities reduced the amount of instructional time in the classrooms

The goal of teaching social skills is to help children develop self-discipline, the ability to control their own behavior, act responsibly, and show respect for themselves and others. According to Dodge and Bickart (1998), educators cannot teach social and emotional skills, including self-discipline, to children. Children are characterized by a sense of self that needs to be cultivated and nurtured through continuous interactions they have each day with caring adults and other children. These skills emerge when children show more confidence in their abilities, develop self-control, and develop and maintain friendships with other children, including those who have different backgrounds.

Social skills are those behaviors that occur in specific situations which predict important social outcomes for children and youth. Gresham and Elliott (1993) stated that social skills are behaviors that lead others to judge whether or not behaviors shown are acceptable. Judgments by other people play a significant role in social skills, because all social behavior occurs in situations where others are making judgments regarding the appropriate or inappropriate behaviors.

Rutherford, Mathur, and Quinn (1998) stated "A socially competent person is capable of initiating and maintaining positive social interactions, developing friendships, establishing collaborative networks, and coping effectively with their social environment"(p.354). They also contended that the lack of these social skills has been identified as a major predictor of low self-esteem, rejection by peers, social ineptness, mental health issues, and delinquency. A number of adolescents who have aggressive, anti-social, or delinquent behavior often have not had the chance to learn the basic social skills that encourage effective participation in various social environments. Many of these children experience peer rejection, report feelings of loneliness and isolation, and show many interfering problem behaviors that are linked to marked deficiencies in social skills. These issues often keep these adolescents from forming productive social interactions and excludes them from establishing positive social relationships.

Social skills encompass communication, building and maintaining trust, providing leadership, and managing conflicts. Students' future success in school and in the workplace depends greatly on more than just mastery of academic content. In today's world, the ability to work with others is essential (Abruscato, 1994). Goodwin (1999) concluded that in the workplace of today and tomorrow, the basic elements of

collaboration, cooperation, and problem solving are critical. Cummings and Haggerty (1997) noted that the U.S. Dept. of Labor Report of 1991 stated that interpersonal skills are essential for students if they are to be successful in finding meaningful work. They discussed that a high intelligence is not necessarily a major predictor of success in life. Emotional intelligence, which includes self-awareness, mood management, self-motivation, impulse-control, and people skills may be a better indicator of success. Consequently, all efforts need to be made to help students develop and maintain appropriate social skills.

The problem of deteriorating social skills in today's youth has been studied by many researchers. Mary Newell, A New Haven psychologist, told the school board that children bring many personal issues to school. Teenage pregnancies, divided families, divorce, and child and spousal abuse are just a few of the challenges. She also stated, "We expect these children to sit down and eat lunch when they have so many things on their minds. Some don't even know where they'll sleep at night" (as cited in Sullivan-DeCarlo and DeFalco 1998, p.80). Students need to develop skills including self-monitoring, problem solving, decision making, and communicating, to experience success in school.

Beyond the immediate threats to children there are many other serious issues. High on the list is the departure of adults from the lives of children. Some reports say that there has been a 50% decrease throughout the last 30 years in the percentage of time parents spend with their children in family-oriented and child-centered activities. The absence of adult supervision and time spent on cooperative activities increases the effects of other negative influences within the child's social environment. Children who are

home alone are usually more susceptible to negative environmental influences than are children backed up by adults (Garbarino, 1997).

Another reason that children's social skills have deteriorated is that social skills often are not practiced in their homes. Parents need to be held accountable for the social development of their children. At St. Joseph Elementary Management School, parents were asked to sign contracts. The contract required the parents to participate in placement meetings, family counseling, home visits, and workshops on parenting skills. The students responded favorably to this program. After completion of the program, these students went to other elementary schools and served as mentors to other students. There was a 50% improvement in all measured areas. The numbers of disciplinary referrals decreased, and students showed increases in academic success (Henley, Fuston, & Peters, 2000).

According to Beland (1997), researchers estimated that 15% of school students are involved in bully/victim problems, and 10% of students are regularly harassed or attacked by bullies. Beland also stated that bullies fall into a high-risk scenario. They view every "bump" or mishap as an act of aggression which demands a comeback; they often perceive that others are out to get them. The article also described that children who had minor behavior problems or were high-risk failed to act with appropriate social skills because they had emotional responses, such as anger, fear, or anxiety which prevented them from showing acceptable behavior.

One way researchers have used to help students learn appropriate social skills is through the teaching of conflict resolution strategies. These strategies are often used to help students learn to work out conflicts in a peaceful manner. Many sociologists

contend that human nature is not intrinsically violent. If children are taught to fear strangers, minorities, or people who appear different, they can also be socialized to trust, care for others, cooperate, and obey the law. Children can be taught how to negotiate, mediate, share, compromise, and bargain in situations that contain conflict. Many public schools are taking on the role of teaching these skills, not because they want to, but because it is essential (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1996).

The intervention that was chosen the most effective with this particular student population in increasing the appropriate social behavior of students was cooperative learning. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), students engaging in cooperative learning tasks tend to have higher academic ability or test results, greater self-confidence, and use social skills positively more often than students without cooperative training. According to Lyman and Foyle (1988), one of the most important research findings was that cooperative learning activities in the classroom improve children's relationships with others, especially those of various social and ethnic groups. Students seemed to be much more tolerant of individuals of other races or ethnic groups different from themselves, and had a greater understanding of the skills they were studying. An article by the California Dept. of Education (2002) stated that positive interdependence is essential to the success of a cooperative group. The cooperative process of the group helps students to learn to give and take. In life, each person can do something, but no one can do everything. If cooperation is successful, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

The teacher researchers considered cooperative learning the best way to instruct the targeted students on appropriate social skills for many reasons. One reason

cooperative learning was chosen was because it kept every student actively involved in every lesson. Every student had to be doing an assigned job; therefore every student was actively learning about the targeted social skill for the week.

Another reason was helping students to evaluate their own learning and behavior. Metacognition was such an important part of actually making the behavior intrinsic. Cooperative learning gave the students a chance to take a hard look at their own ways of relating to others. This method allowed them to look at the positive and the negative parts of their own behavior. Cooperative learning was also chosen to help the students learn to build their own self-esteem and build trust with other students. Cooperative learning allowed them to bond with others and created a team atmosphere where students were free to try new things and make mistakes freely. The researchers designed the plan to give students the ability to transfer the knowledge of cooperative learning into all the areas of their lives. The students had the opportunity to establish positive interactions and create intrinsic behaviors which will benefit the students as productive members of society.

The teacher researchers concluded that a plan to improve appropriate social skills needed to be implemented within their school. The setting for the research took place in an elementary school. The students who participated in this research were in self-contained second and sixth grade classrooms.

There were approximately 80 students assigned by the principal in the second and sixth grades who were targeted for this project. The data were collected through pretests and posttests administered in September 2002 and March 2003. Data were collected by the research team at a designated time throughout the research period by way of

observation checklists and student surveys.

As part of this research, students gained knowledge from the weekly direct instruction, by the teacher researchers, of each specific designated appropriate social skill. The students practiced these skills in a group of their peers utilizing cooperative learning activities.

The researchers agreed that the second and sixth grade students indicated a lack of appropriate social skills. A determination was made that some reasons for this problem were a high mobility rate, lack of school wide discipline plan, and lack of parent involvement and other parental issues. The goal was to improve social skills in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and on the playground.

Objective and Action Plan

> As a result of implementing cooperative learning strategies during the period of September 2002 to February 2003, the targeted second and sixth grade students will increase their ability to use appropriate social skills in structured and unstructured environments, as measured by observations, checklists, assessments, and student surveys.

Processes to achieve this objective were:

1. Developed lessons to teach specific social skills through direct instruction.
2. Organized groups to practice social skills in cooperative settings.
3. Utilized social skills checklists, pretest/posttests, teacher observations, and surveys as a means of measurement.

Week 1: Introduction/Gathering Baseline Data

*Students completed pretest.

*Students completed survey.

*Teachers completed survey.

*Researchers completed checklist for each student.

Week 2: Established base groups/began social skills instruction

*Group bonding

*Using quiet voices

Week 3: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Following directions

Week 4: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Taking turns

*Patient waiting

*Re-assessed using surveys and checklists

Week 5: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Praising

*Saying kind things

*Using names

Week 6: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Sharing ideas, materials, and tasks

Week 7: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Helping others

*Asking for help

*Re-assessed using surveys and checklists

Week 8: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Resolving conflicts

Week 9: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Accepting differences

Week 10: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Staying on task

Week 11: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Active listening

*Re-assessed using surveys and checklists

Week 12: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Communicating clearly

*Paraphrasing

Week 13: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Participating equally

Week 14: Social Skills Instruction and Practice

*Managing materials

*Recording ideas

*Final assessment using checklists, surveys, and posttests

Assessment Plan

In order to determine the effects of the intervention, the researchers administered a pretest at the beginning of the study before any direct instruction took place. A posttest was administered at the end of the study to determine the success of the research. An observation checklist on the use of appropriate social skills was completed on a monthly basis. After direct instruction of the social skills during each month, the researchers used the checklist to observe evidence of the skill that was taught while the students were engaged in cooperative learning activities. This occurred as the skills were taught and

practiced. The observation period was approximately 30-40 minutes in duration on a monthly basis. Student surveys were used to determine students' attitudes toward the intervention. The student survey was given prior to the intervention, at the end of the project, and on a monthly basis. The teachers completed a survey at the beginning of the study.

The teacher researchers agreed that the three main areas for social skills development for the targeted school included positive feelings about self, self control, and positive interaction with others. The teacher researchers speculated that as each social skill was taught, students would be able to implement those skills in the classroom setting and transfer those skills into the other areas of interpersonal activity.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The targeted second and sixth grade students exhibited a lack of appropriate social skills. This was determined by observed disruptive behavior in the classroom, increased need for counseling services, and inappropriate behavior during unstructured activities. Evidence was gathered by teacher surveys, student surveys, teacher observation, checklists, and pretests. The objective was to increase the students' ability to use appropriate social skills in structured and unstructured environments. The expected outcome was that through the use of direct instruction of social skills and practice with cooperative learning, the students would possess the ability to choose appropriate behaviors in the school environment.

The targeted school experienced increases in classroom disruptions and escalation of combatant behavior. The students were a highly mobile population; therefore, there was difficulty with continuity of school-wide rules and discipline. There was often not enough time or personnel to carry through with the new students. Not only was time an issue, but there was no real organized school discipline plan.

The lack of parental involvement was a ongoing concern for the school personnel. Many parents were not attending school functions and the numbers in the parent organization were dwindling. Students were spending many hours home alone, others were involved in unstructured, unsupervised activities after school, and several students lived in alternative family situations. All of these situations contributed to the demise of appropriate social behavior that was lacking in the students' population.

The main objective of this research was to instill appropriate social skills in the students of the targeted school. The teacher researchers concluded that the need for direct instruction of these skills overwhelmingly evident. Teachers' attitudes were surveyed, and there was unanimous agreement that many students lacked the knowledge of appropriate social skills (See Appendix A). The teacher researchers observed student behavior every week for 14 weeks. Students' attitudes toward their own behavior were surveyed quarterly. A pretest and posttest were administered to gauge the students' progress over time.

The action plan took place in the fall semester and was 14 weeks in length. The teacher researchers chose 19 specific behaviors in which the students were deficient. These behaviors were the focus over the duration of the research. Each week, a skill was chosen and taught using direct instruction. The students were given an opportunity to practice the skill that was taught in their cooperative groups. Teacher researchers observed the use of the skills during the cooperative learning activities. Teacher researchers used a variety of sources to demonstrate the appropriate behavior in given situations. Literature, T-charts, newspapers, videos, art and science projects, higher-order thinking activities, grade level curriculum, role playing, journaling, and group games

were some of the ancillary materials used to help the students to grasp each social skill concept. Students were grouped cooperatively by one high functioning student, one low functioning student, and two average functioning students. The students remained in the same group for the entire duration of the research.

There was a schedule of targeted behaviors to teach each week. The behaviors were observed by the teacher researchers and recorded approximately every four weeks. The first few weeks focused on group bonding, using quiet voices, following directions, taking turns, and patient waiting. The targeted behaviors during the next observation period were praising, saying kind things, using names, sharing, helping others, and asking for help. The next areas of focus were resolving conflicts, accepting differences, staying on task, and active listening. During the final few weeks of the action plan, the researchers focused on communicating clearly, paraphrasing, participating equally, managing materials, and recording ideas.

Lesson plans were varied due to age level differences. Each teacher researcher was responsible to present each skill directly and provide a cooperative activity. As the skills were practiced in cooperative groups, teacher researchers used checklists to determine if each student was displaying the skill that was taught (See Appendix B). Students' attitudes were measured monthly by a survey (See Appendix C). This survey was designed to measure any change in attitudes throughout the research. The action plan was slightly modified in that the survey was omitted during one of the monthly observation periods. The student survey was given three times during the research, instead of four. This adjustment was made because of the complexity of the school calendar. The students were also asked to take a pretest and posttest in order to have

another vehicle to evaluate improvement over time (See Appendix D).

Presentation and Analysis of Results

After following through with the action plan and analyzing the data the teacher researchers came to the conclusion that the direct instruction of appropriate social skills using cooperative learning was an effective way for the targeted students to improve their behavior and increase their time on task.

The researchers recorded the percentages of student's correct responses on the student's survey of attitudes toward appropriate social skills from September to December (See Table 4). Six out of ten questions were answered by students with a response that showed improvement in students' attitudes toward appropriate social skills. The teacher researchers were interested in the fluctuation in the students' responses. Although the observations by the teachers exhibited improvement, the student survey results suggested that the students were inconsistent in their responses. In many cases, improvement was indicated from September to October, but less improvement from September to December. The teacher researchers speculated that these results were inconsistent because the students were not as serious about their own behavior at the onset of the research as they were at the conclusion of the action plan. The researchers also surmised that another reason for the inconsistency may have been due to the overload of the school calendar.

An issue that the teacher researchers did not take into consideration was the change in students' mobility. For example, research results showed discrepancies due to students moving in or out of the school building or to students' absenteeism. The teacher researchers also considered the time frame in which the surveys were given. Due to the

curriculum requirements and the school calendar, the survey results could have been skewed because of a lack of time.

The teacher researchers observed students' behavior over a period of four months, through the use of checklists. Table 5 shows teacher observation of student's usage of appropriate social skills over time. The teacher researchers noted an increase in all of the targeted skills, and an increase of more than 20% in 16 out of the 22 appropriate social skills that were targeted. The improvement was noted by substitute teachers who came into the classrooms. The guests observed that the classes were well behaved and well-mannered. Improvement became evident as the students in one of the targeted classrooms modeled appropriate social skills to a new student who moved into that classroom. The students in the classroom who had learned appropriate social skills worked very diligently to help the new student who was lacking in appropriate social skills, to learn ways to handle his behavior. The students continually modeled appropriate behavior and worked to correct the new student's behavior. The students in the targeted classrooms were observed repeatedly helping other students in and out of the targeted classrooms. They helped other students remember appropriate social skills they had learned and they modeled appropriate behavior for younger students in the school building. These students seemed to be able to apply these skills in many different situations, such as gym class, lunchroom, playground times. The teacher researchers also noted that the students continually accepted differences of the new students who moved into the targeted classrooms during the research.

Table 4

Percent of Responses on the Student's Survey of Attitudes Toward Appropriate Social Skills Over Time

Survey Questions	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec
I raise my hand to speak.	57	57	38	75
I do not interrupt others.	57	67	55	55
I use a quiet voice in groups.	54	65	57	53
I wait in the lunch line without pushing.	84	94	90	92
I say please/thank you to lunch helpers.	78	63	80	71
I don't talk with food in my mouth or throw food.	76	94	76	76
I share and take turns on the playground.	78	84	84	86
I solve problems without hitting, name-calling, or tattling.	59	65	53	61
When the bell rings, I line up without pushing or talking.	59	78	80	73
I get along with others most of the time	57	69	61	69

n=51

The students took a pretest in September at the beginning of the research. The results showed that a high percentage of the students already knew the correct answers to the presented questions; however their behavior did not reflect the application of that knowledge in the classroom setting.

Table 5

Percent of Observed Student's Usage of Appropriate Social Skills Over Time

Social Skills Checklist	Sept.	Dec.
Using quiet voices	45	88
Following directions	48	89
Taking turns	43	80
Patient waiting	52	77
Praising	39	61
Using names	30	100
Saying kind things	36	54
Sharing ideas	46	64
Sharing task	48	98
Sharing materials	46	95
Helping others	38	64
Asking for help	59	66
Resolving conflicts	39	61
Accepting differences	32	93
Staying on task	36	84
Staying with the team	52	68
Active listening	39	84
Communicating clearly	48	55
Paraphrasing	43	68
Participating equally	41	88
Managing materials	34	84
Recording ideas	43	71

n=56

The posttest was given in December at the conclusion of the study. The results showed a small improvement. The teacher researchers observed the students taking

responses more seriously at the end of the research. The students were more open and able to honestly reflect on their own behavior (See Table 6).

The teacher researchers saw positive results from the pretest and posttest. Some changes that may be beneficial are making the questions more in-depth, talking to the students about honesty, and giving the students a better idea of the purpose of the tests.

Table 6

Percent of Correct Responses on the Appropriate Social Skills Pretest and Posttest

Question	Pretest (Sept.)	Posttest (Dec.)
1. Raise my hand when I know the answer and wait for the teacher to call on me.	99	100
2. Wait until two teacher are done talking or say excuse me if an emergency.	98	95
3. My voice should only be loud enough for my group to hear.	97	97
4. Wait my turn in line without touching anyone.	97	100
5. Say thank you very much when someone gives you something.	98	100
6. Talk only when your mouth is empty.	97	99
7. When I learn a new game, I let others play who would like to.	96	98
8. I try to talk it our when I have a conflict.	97	98
9. When the bell rings, I line up right away.	96	99
10. My behavior in school should be good and I should think about making the right choices.	98	99

n=53

Conclusions and Recommendations

The teacher researchers concluded that teaching social skills through cooperative learning may be productive in the elementary school. Positive comments from parents, staff , support staff, and students emphasized the importance of basic social skills in and out of the classroom, and the need for teachers to provide instruction.

The teacher researchers also found that cooperative learning was an effective way to teach appropriate social skills. The students seemed to have a more intrinsic reason to use appropriate social skills. They were complimented on their positive behavior by guests in the classrooms and they had a feeling of ownership and pride about their ability to control their own behavior. The students in cooperative groups each had a job and they were able to actively participate in their own learning. Students were able to experience the results of their learning and teamwork which also promoted ownership and pride.

Another conclusion observed by the teacher researchers was that students were on task for a higher percentage of the day. More work was completed, students were able to reflect on their own behavior and learning, and the students were able to see the areas where improvement was needed. The teacher researchers were able to cover more of the district and state curriculum and less time was needed to solve behavior problems. Students were much more supportive to one another and were willing to be an active participant in others' learning.

The teacher researchers would recommend three changes in the action plan. One change that needs to be considered is the awareness of student mobility. There were some discrepancies due to students' absenteeism and students moving in and out of the attendance area. Another area for alteration is the clarification of survey and test

vocabulary. Many of the questions were ambiguous and needed clarification, especially for the younger students. The third area for consideration is the time constraints of the school calendar. Due to the many requirements of the school, there is pressure to fit many activities and obligations into the school year.

The teacher researchers recommend combining or decreasing the number of social skills taught. Because of the various targeted age levels and a limited amount of time for the research, decreasing the number of targeted skills may be more feasible. Some of the skills taught may have been inappropriate for certain age levels. The researchers recommend additional research in this area.

This study only reinforced the definite need for the teaching of social skills through a cooperative learning environment. The teacher researchers agreed that there were many positive results that came from the research. In today's family make-up, children are sometimes left to learn social skills on their own without appropriate adult instruction. Johnson and Johnson (1999) stated:

> When efforts are structured cooperatively, there is considerable evidence that students will exert more effort to achieve (learn more, use higher level reasoning strategies more frequently, build more complete and complex conceptual structures, and retain information learned more accurately), build more positive and supportive relationships (including relationships with diverse individuals), and develop in more healthy ways (psychological health, self-esteem, ability to manage stress and adversity) (p. 73).

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APPENDIX A
TEACHER SOCIAL SKILLS SURVEY

Please circle agree (A), disagree (D), or no opinion (N).

1. You spend a substantial amount of instructional time out of your day to mediate conflicts and redirect students.	A	D	N
2. It is necessary to teach social skills in the classroom.	A	D	N
3. You feel you are not responsible for teaching social skills.	A	D	N
4. You feel you are already prepared to teach classroom social skills.	A	D	N
5. You would be willing to learn more about the teaching of social skills in the classroom.	A	D	N
6. Your students do not come to school knowing appropriate social skills.	A	D	N
7. Your students do not understand and successfully mediate conflict on their own.	A	D	N
8. Students in your school generally lack appropriate social skills.	A	D	N

SOCIAL SKILLS CHECKLIST

Social Skill	Name	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Using Quiet Voices							
Following Directions							
Taking Turns							
Patient Waiting							
Praising/Kind words							
Using Names							
Share ideas, materials							
Helping Others							
Asking for Help							
Resolving Conflicts							
Accept Differences							
Stay on Task							
Active Listening							
Communicate Clearly							
Paraphrasing							
Participate Equally							
Managing Materials							
Recording Ideas							

APPENDIX C
Student Survey

	Yes	No	Sometimes
1. I raise my hand in class when I want to speak.			
2. I do not interrupt when someone is speaking.			
3. I use a quiet voice when working in a group.			
4. I wait in the lunch line without pushing.			
5. I say please and thank you to the lunch teachers and other lunch helpers.			
6. I do not talk when my mouth is full and I don't throw food.			
7. I share equipment and take turns on the playground.			
8. When someone makes me angry, I try to solve the problem without hitting, name-calling, or telling the teacher.			
9. When the bell rings, I stop playing and line up without pushing or talking.			
10. I am very good at getting along with others most of the time.			

APPENDIX D

Pretest/Posttest

Directions: Circle the correct answer to each question.

1. When I know the answer to a question during class, I should…
   A. yell the answer as loud as I can.
   B. raise my hand and wait until the teacher calls on me.
   C. tell the person next to me the answer.

2. When two teachers are talking, I should…
   A. walk between them.
   B. talk to my friends around me until they are done.
   C. wait until they are done, unless there is an emergency and then I say excuse me.

3. When I am working in a group, my voice should be…
   A. loud enough so only my group can hear.
   B. as loud as I can make it.
   C. louder than the other people in my room.

4. When I am waiting in line for lunch, I should…
   A. try to always be first.
   B. make sure everyone else is standing the right way.
   C. stand and wait until my turn without touching anyone.

5. When the lunch teachers ask a question or give me food, I should say…
   A. "I don't like that, it's gross."
   B. "Give me some more!"
   C. "Thank you very much!"

6. I can talk quietly in the lunchroom as long as …
   A. my mouth is empty.
   B. I am throwing food.
   C. the principal is gone.

7. When I learn a new game, I will…
   A. keep it to myself and my best friend.
   B. let others play who want to.
   C. not let anyone else play.

8. When someone bumps into me on the playground, I will…
   A. call them names and hit them.
   B. tell the teacher.
   C. try to solve the problem myself by talking it out.

9. When the bell rings, I should…
   A. play a little longer.
   B. line up without talking.
   C. make sure everyone else is lined up.

10. My behavior in school should be…
   A. good when I am in a good mood.
   B. good when I get my way.
   C. good and I should think about making the right choices.

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